

Inana, Queen of Apsu

By Matthew Striegel

An epic poem in trochaic tetrameter,

And in the tradition of the Kalevala, Song of Hiawatha,
and Silmarillion

To Nathan Striegel

When I was in my twenties, I was still figuring out what my worldview and beliefs really were. I had been brought up a Christian, and consider myself one now. But in college I, like most people I suspect, was going through periods of doubt and uncertainty. During that time, I read extensively about different religions, and mythologies. It was from these readings that I first became acquainted with Mesopotamian myth.

The mythology of the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians consist of three major stories, and several other smaller ones. The first of the major stories is their creation myth, the Enuma Elish. Then there is the Epic of Gilgamesh. Finally, there is the descent of Inana.

Inana, the goddess of war, love, and keeper of the Me' tablets of wisdom, journeys to the underworld, seemingly out of a desire to gain still more power. She doesn't succeed, instead being captured by Nergal, one of the gods of the underworld and pestilence. Eventually, she is rescued, but her lover, Tammuz, must spend half a year in the underworld to gain her freedom. This myth explained the changing of the seasons to the Mesopotamians, as the myth of Persephone did for the Greeks

I wondered, what if the story was 'real'? What if the characters were human, and the real point of the story was the danger of unchecked greed and ambition? So, in

my retelling, Inana represents that, along with the dangers of being consumed by rage and fear.

-Matthew Striegel

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I tell a tale of long ago,
before men wrote down their history.
Before Egyptian pyramids,
and before the dawn of Sumer.

In the land between the rivers,
north of where Babylon would stand,
between the deserts and mountains,
there was the city of Apsu.

Most of the human race lived there,
after the first age died by flood,
after the ark's passengers left,
to reclaim and rebuild the world.

The people of Apsu were dark
in color and complexion.

Robust and strong and clever men,
whose children would found the nations.

Apsu was enclosed by a wall
to guard against beast and brigand.

Its army had two divisions
to fight both at home and abroad.

The ruler of Apsu, King Nanna,
did take as queen, Ningal the fair.

Ningal did bear him one fine son
and two daughters, like night and day.

Utu was the name of the son,
strong and brave, of unmatched courage
but lacking great intelligence,
Utu, strong man and stolid.

The youngest was Erishkigal,
Erishkigal fair and gentle,
devoted to the moon god, Sin,
Sin the patron god of Apsu.

The middle child Inana was.
Neither beautiful nor ugly,
loved by both parents but favored
by none. Inana, future queen.
Hearken, reader, to the story
of Inana, fierce and powerful.
And learn how easily men fall
when driven by pride and anger.

II

And Utu trained with his father.
Learned the arts of hunting and war.
Learned to wield the sword and the spear.
For he was to be the next king.

And Erishkigal, gentle and
fair did sit on her mother's lap,

and heard the tales of Apsu's gods.
The old story of creation.

Of Apsu and Tiamet
Gods of the fresh and salt water.
Both rulers of and the stuff of
the primordial beginning.

And how they gave birth to others.
And Tiamet grew tired and angry,
and did regret their children born,
and sought to slay them, one and all.

And her children resisted death.
Death in the form of Tiamet.
And instead they slew her mother,
and thus they became eternal.

And from her mother's corpse did make
the dry lands and skies of the earth.
And assumed their stations in life,

and thus governed the new formed world.

Enlil became the lord of winds.

Ninhursag was Mother Nature.

And Ea, clever craftsman, did
make a race of human servants.

“The gods give life and take away,”

Ningal told young Erishkigal.

Erishkigal, her favorite child.

Mother and daughter did both have

a love of all the sacred things.

“But what of Sin?” her daughter asked.

“Where does Apsu’s divine patron
fit into the sacred stories?”

And the mother, Ningal, answered.

“Look into the black and clear night.

For there you see the eye of Sin.

The moon, which gives us rest from day.

Cool balm for the sun's scorching heat."

And Ningal and Erishkigal
did both sing the sacred anthems,
and prayed reverently to the gods.

Erishkigal did vow to be
Priestess of Sin while still a child.
Inana, meanwhile, she looked on.
Saw the mother and sister's bond.

And felt like she belonged not.
For she believed the sacred tales,
but she felt none of the tender love
for them that her family did.

So she did turn and go outside
to the courts of her father's house,
and did see Nanna and Utu
sparring with the guards in training.

She watched them for a time and then
thought about a new idea.

If Utu, strong and stolid, fought
why not Inana, strong and fierce?

And Inana grabbed a sword from
where they were stored, off to the side.

And Inana, strong and prideful,
leapt into the training session.

Utu, strong and stolid, cried out
and raised his weapon to defend.

But Inana, fierce and proud did
have him disarmed, clutching his hand.

“What’s this, my girl?” her father cried
as Inana did brandish her sword
in the direction of the king,
her father, the lord of Apsu.

“Why do you come among the men,

and make a fool of your brother?
Go back to your mother's chamber.
Learn what's proper for a woman."

"No, I will not go," she answered.
"That is the place for my sister,
Erishkigal, fair and gentle.
She will be a priestess of Sin.

But what of me? Am I alone?
Clearly I must make my own way.
And if Utu, strong and stolid,
fights for you, why not Inana?"

And she did strike with her weapon.
Did take arms against father king.
Not to kill or even to hurt,
but to show she would have her way.

And Nanna, king of Apsu did
parry the strikes of his daughter.

Noted inherent skill in her.
Noted her anger and fierce will.

He finally did strike her blade
out of the hand of his daughter.
The two gazed at each other then,
angry daughter, thoughtful father.

Finally the Apsu king said,
“Perhaps you do have another place.
For skill you have, but it’s untamed.
Much as you are, my fierce daughter.”

King Nanna allowed Inana
to spar with him and her brother.
For he saw in her a wildness
that neither man nor god could tame.

III

So grew Utu and Inana.
Grew and prospered as warriors.
For Utu, strong and stolid,

could see that her skills were greater.

But Utu accepted this fact.

Not intelligent was Utu.

Rarely did he ever question,
but simply took things as they were.

Nanna, king of Apsu thought
it good to have two warriors.
But since only one son had he,
the other would be a woman.

Queen Ningal, the fair and pious,
was not pleased with her daughter's choice.

So she resolved to speak with them,
with both Nanna and Inana.

She said, "Daughter why do you do
that which becomes not a woman?

Fighting and death belong to men.
From the sacred tales, we know this.

For male children slew Tiamet,
and from her did make the world.
But when women fight like Tiamet,
it brings chaos and destruction.

Home is the place for a woman.
Making food and rearing children.
Singing sacred songs to the gods,
and submitting to her husband.

But you, Inana, my dear child,
what will you gain by fighting men?
You will never have a husband.
Never know the joys of mothers.

For what man would possibly want
a woman manlier than he?
They will fear and ridicule you
if you are not kind and gentle.

Like Erishkigal, your sister,

learn the sacred songs and stories.
Learn to cook for men and make love.
That's how they will grow to love you."

But Inana, bold and fearsome,
Inana, future Apsu queen,
did shake her head and say to her
"Mother, what are your ways to me?

You say that the gods have ordered
the world as you think it should be.
Well then, why did the gods give me
a strength to rival any mans?

Why do the gods make us different,
make us unique, not all the same?

Is it not so I can do this
and honor them in my own way?

As for men, why do you worry?

Are you impatient to be old?
To be a grandmother near death?

To join the gods and leave this life?

If I find any man worthy,
then he shall take me as I now am,
strong, fierce, proud and single minded,
but I'll still not be submissive."

So Queen Ningal formed a new plan
to draw her daughter from man's ways,
draw her back to the woman's world,
to motherhood and sacred things.

She went to the common people
and adopted an orphan girl.
A lady, to be handmaiden,
someone to persuade Inana

to be gentle and submissive.
She found Ninshabar the lovely,
the same age as wayward daughter,
to give friendship and influence.

Of beauty and grace and wisdom
to Ninshabar, none could compare.
So the queen took Ninshabar home
to the palace of King Nanna.

Ninshabar would serve Inana,
Inana the proud and fearsome.
The entire palace loved her,
as a daughter, not a servant.

She had such exceeding beauty;
Ninshabar seemed the real princess.
With Inana, she had friendship,
but she never had influence.

IV

As the world turns, the years pass by.
The three children of King Nanna,
joint heirs to the throne of Apsu,
grew from childhood to adulthood.

King Nanna and his two favorites,
his son Utu, strong and stolid,
and his daughter, fierce Inana,
to the northern woods did travel.

Hunting meat when not fighting men
is the pastime of all fighters.
Went they out to hunt the swift deer
with swords and spears at ready.

And Inana, proud and fearsome,
she did spot a mighty stag and
let loose her spear and pierced its hide.
So the prey fell to Inana.

Utu and the king, her father,
did clasp her shoulders in respect.
For Inana, fierce and proud, was
the greatest hunter among them.

They settled down to cut their meat,

and to gather up all its flesh.
Back at the palace they would eat
the spoil, the prize of hunting.

When, lo, they heard a rustling.
They looked up and they did behold
three men who were much like them,
especially the lead stranger.

He resembled the King Nanna,
only wilder and more feral.
And in this did he also look
like Inana, proud and fearsome.

“My children, lay low,” said the king.
“Be quiet, see that you aren’t seen.
Let these men pass by us now.
Later on, I will explain why.”

So they all lay low and quiet,
their bellies pressed into the ground.

Inana marveled at the king,
though she questioned not his courage.

Soon, the three men left their sight and
Inana, his daughter questioned
“Father, what means this hiding here?
If enemies, why not fight them?”

And Nanna, king of Apsu said
“Say the gods, it is an ill thing
to strike down and kill a kinsman,
though evil and base he may be.

For I have one brother, Nergal.
Nergal, violent and prideful.
Nergal, chief of thieves and bandits.
Nergal, the cruel and ambitious.

Years ago when your grandparents
did sit on the throne of Apsu,
Then Nergal and I were summoned,

when they saw that their deaths were nigh.

They declared me to be their heir.

Nanna, not Nergal would be king.

For they saw that one of their sons

had goodness, and one was evil.

Nergal would have driven Apsu

to ruin and to destruction.

Nergal would not accept his wish.

no respect had he for father.

In vainglory and ambition,

tried to take the throne of Apsu.

And so we battled with each other.

Shed the blood of our own people.

Till at last my brother, Nergal

was defeated and then banished.

But then in the wilderness he

gathered up wild men and brigands.”

“Why did you not kill him, father?”
asked Inana, proud and fearsome.
“Brother and uncle he may be.
But we would be blessed without him.”

“Beware vain ambition, my child,”
answered Nanna, wise and good king.
“We will always defend Apsu,
but we must not commit murder.

He attacked us on occasion,
but he never caused much damage.
He attacks us now but rarely,
hurts himself more than the Apsu.”

So they gathered up their fresh kill,
food to place on the king’s table.
They returned home, and Inana
thought of Nergal, the betrayer.

Finally came the fateful day
when King Nanna and Queen Ningal
did depart this life and the world.
Their children were then left alone.

So Inana, proud and fearsome,
recalling the tale of Nergal,
the betrayer of his family,
did address her two siblings thus.

“Erishkigal and Utu, let’s
agree to share our father’s kingship.
Let us not quarrel over crowns
and not break the bonds of family.

Each of us blessed by the gods
with distinctive gifts and talents.
Let us then resolve to rule just
those things in which we excel.

Pious sister, Erishkigal,

lover of gods and of people,
take charge of the peaceful commerce
and the worship of the moon god.

Utu, brother, strong and stolid,
you remain within the city.
Train the warriors, guard the walls.
Find and punish all law breakers.

While I, Inana, proud and fierce,
I will travel out of Apsu.
With the finest of our fighters,
I will conquer all outsiders.”

Inana thus pleased her siblings,
for they did not want to fight her.
Still, Erishkigal, the gentle,
questioned one word of Inana.

“Sister, why do you propose to
go and fight the people outside?

What are they to us in Apsu
if they stay outside our borders?"

And Inana, the new ruler,
did say, "Sister, you remember.
Outside these lands dwells our uncle,
Nergal, chief of thieves and bandits.

The day will come when he shall hear
of the death of both our parents.
His ambition will drive him on
to attack us untried rulers.

I would do battle with him first.
I'll finish what father started.
Father's hand was stayed by blood ties.
But a foe is how I see him."

Then Inana, proud and fearsome,
did persuade her weaker siblings.
Little did she know that she would

be the final queen of Apsu.

VI

Inana brought war to Apsu.

She attacked her uncle, Nergal,
Nergal, chief of thieves and brigands
before he knew of King Nanna's death.

Inana ambushed the campgrounds.

She, Inana, proud and fearsome,
slew the families of the brigands.
She killed all the wives and children.

Nergal, chief of thieves and brigands,
did swear vengeance on Inana,
on Inana, queen of Apsu,
on Inana, proud and fearsome.

Though stone walls circled her city,
the farmers and fields of Apsu
which gave Apsu food abundant,
stood outside and all unguarded.

Nergal, chief of thieves and brigands,
did attack these simple farmers.
The most vulnerable subjects
of Inana, queen of Apsu.

Back and forth, the rivals raided.
Evenly matched were their fighters.
For their efforts, they gained nothing
apart from hatred, ever growing.

Still, not every encounter
with others would end in violence.
For Inana, queen of Apsu,
found, if not love, then great passion.

Tammuz, powerful and handsome,
trained by Utu, strong and stolid,
joined the army of Inana.
Side by side, the two of them fought.

And Inana, queen of Apsu
did take notice of her fighter,
of Tammuz, the strong and handsome.
She asked, "Tammuz, do you love me?"

Confessed Tammuz, strong and handsome,
"Yes my queen, I indeed love you.
I would gladly be your husband
and the father of your children."
Said Inana, "There is room for
no one else to sit beside me.
On the throne of Apsu, there is
only room for me, Inana.

I, Inana, strong and fearsome,
though I look on you with favor,
I will never submit to men.
I'll not be meek wife and mother."

Then said Tammuz to Inana,
"I would never try to tame you.

For a gentle, meek Inana
would no longer be Inana.

When I pledged loyalty to you,
I swore to obey you always.
Thus let Tammuz be your soldier,
and lover, but not your master.”

And these words pleased Queen Inana.
So they fought at each other’s side.
When they felt their passion calling,
they indulged it, then kept fighting.

VII

One day they returned from battle,
Inana, queen of Apsu with
her warriors on horses and
Ninshabar, her handmaid, with them.

While seated upon her war horse,
Inana saw from a distance
Nergal’s raiders at her farmland,

setting fire to crops of Apsu.

Only one farmer left alive,
and he was without defenses.

Said Inana to her soldiers,
“More of Nergal’s blood to be spilled.

Let us send some fresh hewn corpses
to my uncle, the betrayer.”

Men of Apsu charged the thieves and,
trampled many under horse hoof.

Put many others to the sword,
till only farmer and one left.

Inana then leapt to the ground.
She grabbed a burning plank of wood.

She struck the thief across the face,
and left a scar to last forever.

“Take that message back to Nergal,”
Inana said to Nergal’s man.

“Tell him Apsu don’t surrender.
Tell him Apsu guard their own.”
As the man ran away screaming,
Queen Inana then focused on

the weather-beaten farmer whom
she had saved from being murdered.
And the man did bow before her.
He said, “Atrahasis am I.”

“For saving my life, Inana
Queen of Apsu, I will give thanks.”
Ninshabar, the queen’s handmaiden
came and stood beside her lady.

From the sidelines where she had been,
staying away from the bloodshed.
Atrahasis did behold her.
Saw her lovely face and figure.

Saw her eyes and long dark tresses.

And he marveled at her beauty.

“You will come with us,” Inana
said to the farmer, Atrahasis.

“Your fields are gone. In the city
will you find new life and purpose.”

To the gates of Apsu they rode,
Atrahasis with Ninshabar.

Tammuz rode beside Inana.

They met up with the King Utu.

They were welcomed into their home.
Through the streets of Apsu they rode.

They passed before the poor subjects
who cheered and welcomed Inana
for her victory over Nergal.

To the temple of Sin they rode.

Where they dismounted and entered.

Where they met with Erishkigal,
Queen and priestess of the god, Sin.
Erishkigal, good and pious.

She raised both her hands to heaven.
Said, "The night falls and the moon rises.
After day, it comes to cool us.
And of our foes, what can be said?

They behold the moon with dead eyes.
With our lord, Sin, and Inana,
Queen of Apsu, we will triumph!"

The people of Apsu, they did
offer prayers and obeisances
to their lord, Sin, god of the moon,
and to Inana, strong and fierce.

When the worship service ended,
Atrahasis asked Inana,
"My queen, what would you have me do?

For I say, I am no soldier.

I would not be a good fighter.
But in my youth, I learned some skills
on how to melt rocks into metal.
I lived with Enki, master craftsman.

Arms and armor, he makes and sells.”

And Inana said to the farmer,
“You speak truly? If so then why
would you ever give up that life?”

“In Enki’s house, I feared for life,”

Atrahasis told Inana.

“He denies the god’s existence.
Many blasphemies he utters.

He gets drunk and defiles women.
Eventually, the gods will slay him,
for they cannot abide such filth,
flouting morals and convention.”

Said Inana, Queen of Apsu,
“Apsu does not possess forges.
Is it possible that Enki
could be brought here to serve Apsu?”

Atrahasis told Inana,
“He serves no one except himself.
I could tell you where to find him,
but I will not return to him.”

The queen agreed with the farmer.
Then the farmer, Atrahasis,
drew from memory instructions
how to find the house of Enki.

VIII

So an expedition began,
a journey to the house of Enki.
Went Inana, Queen of Apsu,
with Tammuz and their best soldiers.

Ninshabar came along as well.

The queen saw that Atrahasis
did behold her handmaid's beauty,
and she did not want to lose her.

Erishkigal, the priestess,
alongside Utu, her brother,
stayed behind with Atrahasis
to guard Apsu against Nergal.

As they journey towards the east,
past the deserts to the mountains,
Ninshabar looked back toward Apsu,
and thought of Atrahasis.

Ninshabar said to Inana,
“Would you still love me, Inana,
if I found a man to marry?
If I bore him many children?”

Said Inana, "Would you serve me
even though you had a husband?
Your loyalty is to Apsu.
Your service is to me, your queen."

"I would always be your servant,"
said Ninshabar, the handmaiden.
"But happiness I still wish for.
Do you not want that for yourself?"

Said Inana, "I don't believe
there's much happiness in this world.
To do your duty and to be great
is all that you can hope for."

Ninshabar said, "A lonely life
you pursue, my Queen Inana.
With Tammuz, you could be happy,
and perhaps me with another."

Said Inana, "Love's great drawback

is to give yourself to others.
To love and be your own master
is to want what never can be.”

Ninshabar, the queen’s handmaiden,
saw the hardness in the queen’s heart.
Saw Inana cared not for love,
so she stopped the conversation.

IX

By and by they reached the mountains.
Travelled through a narrow canyon.
Saw an edifice of stone,
the home of the craftsman, Enki.

The caravan reached the entrance.
They were greeted by Ninurta,
son and steward of the craftsman
with bodyguards at the ready.

“What do you want of Enki?” asked
Ninurta, son and steward. Said

Inana, Queen of Apsu, "We
wish to purchase weapons from you.

We have brought you a cache of gold.

Make us all the swords this will buy.

So that we may then continue
to make war among the brigands."

Ninurta inspected the gold.

Told Inana, "It will be well.

Rest yourselves inside our stone hall."

Ninurta then led Inana

and her party inside the hall.

They all sat at Enki's table
while her soldiers brought the gold in.

And as they laid the gold inside,

Ninurta gave them food and drink.

Had food brought by Enki's women.

All of Enki's female servants

were beautiful and loosely clothed.

They were of all shapes and sizes,
were from maids to mothers in age.

After Inana ate her fill,
she requested to Ninurta.

“I have also come for Enki.
Is it possible to see him?
For I know he has much wisdom,
and I seek his help in my war.

The war between myself and Nergal,
he who’s king of thieves and bandits.”

To Inana, Enki’s son said,
“Enki rarely comes out these days.

Know that himself he serves only.
But an audience, I’ll ask for.”
To the inner halls, he went there,
dark and grimy in the torchlight.

Later, he came to Inana.
Said, "Enki agrees to see you."
The queen, Tammuz and Ninshabar
went inside, led by Ninurta.

They soon came to Enki's chamber.
On a large and supple cushion,
flanked by young and pretty women,
drunk on wine from chalice in hand,

sat an old man, fat and grizzled.
He had but few wisps of white hair.
Drunkenness had dulled his brown eyes.
His one garment was a loincloth.

Thus appeared the fabled Enki.
And Inana with her servants
were astonished with revulsion
at this filthy remnant of man.

Enki squinted at Inana.
Tried to focus his attention.
To the queen of Apsu, he asked,
“What do you want, and what’s for me?”

Then he saw the queen’s handmaiden.
Looked upon the lovely woman.
Saw her long and raven tresses.
Saw her pleasing and curved figure.

All at once, his glazed eyes sharpened.
And he stood up from the cushion.
He approached Inana’s handmaid,
with a smile lustful and greedy.

As the handmaiden looked downward,
Enki grabbed her hair and sniffed it.
Ninshabar, disgusted, pulled back
even Queen Inana bristled.

Said Enki, “I’m at your service.

Anything for this great beauty.
I have much gold here in my house.
I can make you many weapons.”

Said Inana, “She’s my servant,
and I did not come to barter
anything for my Ninshabar.”
And Ninshabar was grateful.

Enki looked in disappointment.
“Then what do you offer?” asked he.
“I need wine, women and money.
Without a fee, I will do nothing.”

Queen Inana checked her anger.
For all elders were respected,
even low and filthy Enki,
or she would have struck him and left.

She had a necklace of pure gold.
She removed this and presented

it to Enki, master craftsman
to pay for some of his knowledge.

Said Enki, "Ninurta, take her.
Show her all the smiths and forges.
Feed and shelter them for one day.
That is all her gift will purchase."

From his father's room, Ninurta
led the three guests to the forges
in the compound's lower sections,
in the heart of ancient mountain.

Queen Inana saw the tunnels
where the miners dug for iron.
Saw them bring it by the cartload,
and then bring it to the forges.

The blacksmiths took the raw iron,
and they heated it till molten.
Once the dross had been burned away,

they took up their heavy hammers.

As the sweat poured off their bodies,
the smiths beat the molted iron.

They created swords and armor
from the molten mass before them.

And Inana, queen of Apsu
watched it all with greatest interest.

She saw how the works of iron
could be used by her in battle.

But unfortunately for her,
there was nothing she could bring back.

For her city of Apsu had not
either mine or forge or skilled men.

Said Inana to Ninurta,
“All of this was made by Enki?”

Said Ninurta, son of Enki,
“My father found the ways of forging.

He came from an eastern family,
mined the iron, learned to shape it,
made a living and got married.

For a long time, he was happy.

Then one day, my mother riding,
from her horse was thrown violently.
Suffered much pain before she died,
and with her, Enki's devotion.

He denounced the gods of nature.

Said that they were no creators,
just the products of a cruel world,
not omnipotent or caring.

So he came to this old compound,
for the work, he did train others,
while he drowned in wine and women
to try and forget my mother."

Asked Inana, "He found this place?"

Said Ninurta, "When he was young,
he discovered this ancient place,
made before the world was flooded."

Said Inana, "Yes, I can feel
both the oldness and the mystery.
The people who built this compound
must have been the oldest of men."

And Ninurta, son of Enki,
gave assent and told Inana,
"In the deepest catacombs here
Enki says that there are secrets."

Asked Inana, "What does he mean?"

Said Ninurta, "That I know not.
He won't answer if you asked him.
It's been many years since he went."

Then Ninurta led them back to
the foyer where worked her soldiers.

They loaded a cart with weapons
which had been bought by the Apsu.

Said Inana to her soldiers,
“All of you return to Apsu.
Give my brother, Utu, weapons.
Use them to continue the war.”
“What about us, Queen Inana?”
asked the beautiful Ninshabar.
“Are we not to go home also?
Is our mission not accomplished?”

“Ninshabar, I have more to do,”
said Inana to Ninshabar.
“Take me to the depths, Ninurta.
I wish to see the lower decks.

I wish to go under the mountain,
and to learn all of the secrets
that the ancient ones did find here.
I’ll learn their forbidden knowledge.”

X

The soldiers returned to Apsu,
bringing weapons forged by Enki
to Utu and Erishkigal,
the co-rulers of the city.

With them too was Atrahasis
to inspect and check the weapons.
Although he was just a farmer,
he had wisdom and knew Enki.

Atrahasis inspected them.
He confirmed that they were well made.
And Utu, strong and stolid, was
grateful to have Atrahasis.

Utu called forth all the soldiers
who stood guard at the city walls
to ensure that the best weapons
were wielded by Apsu's front line.

Then a herald came to Utu.
Told him that an emissary
from Nergal, the scourge of Apsu,
demanded to see Inana.

So Utu and Erishkigal
looked at one another in fear.
For they didn't want to face him
without their sister, Inana.
But they hadn't any options.
So went Utu, strong and stolid.
He climbed the walls of Apsu and
beheld the man sent by Nergal.

Saw the scar on his face
where the flesh had burned with fire.
This was the same man Inana
had beaten and mutilated.

He told Utu, strong and stolid,
"I am Nergal's man, Lagoda.

Why do you come and not the queen?

Why then comes her brother, Utu?"

"I rule Apsu with my sisters.

Inana cannot be bothered
with a dog like thee," said Utu.

"Deliver your message to me.

And see that you show me respect,

for of this city, I am king.

A favor, I grant by coming."

So spoke Utu, strong and stolid.

In the hopes that by his boldness

he might shoo away Lagoda.

But the words Lagoda saw through
and perceived that the queen was gone.

"Apsu has only one true king,"

said Lagoda with insolence.

"He leads me and I follow him.

He is Nergal, the almighty.

For years has he led the people
who were cast away by Apsu.
He taught them to live and prosper.
We have grown into a nation.

But now the world grows harsher.
Food is harder now to come by.
So I tried for Apsu's bounty,
to glean food for wives and children.
I would not have taken it all.
I would not leave Apsu starving.
But your sister, the she devil
killed my friends and burned with fire."

"What is that to me?" asked Utu.

"I call you a thief and liar.
Inana was right to brand you.
I call you beast, and not a man."

“You’re the thief and you’re no king!”
roared Lagoda, out of patience.
“I say Nergal is the true king!
You should give back his throne to him.

He would let us live in Apsu,
and would provide for everybody.
Not like you who tried to kill us.”
Utu, strong and stolid, answered,

“The unjust deserve no mercy.
You can go home and die slowly,
or die fast, if you attack us.”
Thus spoke Utu to Lagoda.

So Lagoda gave no answer.
He just turned his horse and galloped
until Utu could not see him.
He knew soon that he’d face Nergal.

XI

Inana, meanwhile did journey

to the bottom of the compound,
with Ninurta, son of Enki.
She found a rough hewn set of stairs.

“To the catacombs, this will lead,”
Ninurta said to Inana.
“If you travel to the bottom,
you will learn about the builders.”

Down the stairs she went, Inana.
Presently, she reached the bottom.
Many rooms and halls she beheld,
her sight guided by hidden lights.

Through rooms, one after another,
going through hall and hall and hall,
went Inana, Queen of Apsu.
Looking for what? She was not sure.

She believed this place had been built
by the eldest men and women.

Those the gods had first created
before in the flood they perished.

In that time, largely forgotten,
it was said that men lived longer.
And in those years, they discovered
what was by the gods, forbidden.

Only whispers came to her age.
They had found, or so it was said,
all the secrets of life and death.
From the gods, power was stolen.

Then to break the world, they threatened.

And a deluge did the gods send,
both to stop them and keep hidden
the secrets of life, forbidden.

But Inana found rooms empty.
Empty chairs, cold hearths and tables
cut from the stone of the mountain,

and now untouched and abandoned.

In one of the halls, a fountain
flowed with water, stale but healthy.
Growing tired after long searching,
Inana drank, then kept walking.

Presently she went into a room,
and sat in the stone carved old seat.
The hearth in front, devoid of fire,
did she stare into and ponder.

Was she simply wasting her time?
Inspecting these cells, abandoned?
What hoped she to discover here?
In these rooms, was there anything?

Then a sound pierced through the silence.

Inana was soon on her feet.

An eerie thumping sound called out.
There was something in the next room.

With her sword in hand, Inana
went to the next doorway over.
And beheld a large stone casket
from which the sound had been coming.

Frightened then was Queen Inana.
Though she feared no living rival,
the dead and supernatural
by the sword could not be vanquished.

She cried out and tried to retreat,
but a force unseen restrained her.
Then into the room it dragged her,
closer to the surrounding casket.

Then the casket's lid swung open.
No dead body could be seen there.

But Inana soon realized that,
much to her increasing horror,

that she was to be imprisoned.

And to confirm her suspicion,
the unseen force spun her around.
She was shoved into the casket.

The lid closed, trapping her within.
For a moment, she saw darkness.
Then she saw pinpricks of starlight,
as if floating through the heavens.

The whole universe, beholding.
And her eyes drifted below her.
She beheld a blue and green sphere.
Her fear gave way to wonder.

She realized it was the whole world.
The earth did not remain static.
But it moved and spun and journeyed,
moved through time as well as through space.

She looked down and saw the ages.

Inana found by focusing
that she could see into the past,
could see times below the deluge.

She saw the ancients' time and world.
They were powerful and long lived,
and many great things they brought forth,
learning of the world of nature.

Delved into the world of spirit.
Because they lived hundreds of years,
they strove to learn all they could learn.
They went beyond what men should know.

Delved into forbidden knowledge.
Enki's compound they had built to
try to hide from God their searching
for a way to reach beyond death.

To reach heaven by their own might,
to heaven they never managed.

But they escaped Earth's space and time,
journeyed to parallel timelines.

They were not Earth's past nor future.

Other worlds God had created,
many untouched by rebellion.

The ancients began to covet

worlds not touched by sin and sorrow.

They did great things that were evil.

They would overturn creation,
spreading evil beyond the Earth.

This the true God would not allow,
so he opened up the heavens
and caused the Earth to be deluged.
By drowning, ended the old ones.

Stopped their evil before it spread.

One good man and his family,
along with many animals,

in a boat the true God placed them.

To restart after the flood ceased.
The flood wiped out the ancient ones.
When the waters began to recede,
the boat moored upon a mountain.

The passengers left to start over.
Generations were born and died.
Most people forgot the true God,
worshipped things, not the Creator.

Their own gods they made to worship.
Then Inana realized the truth.
Her god, Sin, and all the others
were nothing but manmade idols.

They were nothing more than fiction.
Then the casket lid reopened.
And Inana found herself lost.
From the compound, the box had moved.

XII

Inana stood in a grey landscape.
She beheld strange new surroundings.
She stood in a grey sand dessert
underneath a cloudy grey sky.

Of the sun, she could see nothing,
but there was still light to see by.
Flat and featureless was the land,
with neither animals nor plants.

There was neither sound nor movement.
Pinched her arm to prove this was real.
Only one other thing she saw,
and it was off in the distance.

A building that looked like Enki's,
so to this she started running.
Presently she reached the entrance.
She then stepped over the threshold.

The interior she saw was
not at all like Enki's compound.
Only one room filled the building.
In the middle stood a grey man.

Nondescript and low in profile,
he seemed like the type of person
who could pass through life unnoticed.
Still, she sensed that if he wanted,

he could master all that he saw.
At the sight of him, the queen paused.

For she felt herself grow wary,
not knowing what to make of him.

But she never let her guard down.

Said the man, "Welcome Inana!

I've expected your arrival.

I have watched your exploration.

Watched you come upon this crossroad."

Said Inana, "What is your name?"

And the grey man told Inana,

"I'm a servant of the true God.

I am the one that you call Death."

And Inana, Queen of Apsu,

gripped her sword to stop from shaking.

"I'll not go with you anywhere.

Not with you to where the dead are."

Said Death to her, "It was you who,

searching for forbidden knowledge,

went to the old one's catacombs.

You awoke the Me' and came here."

"I know not what you speak of,"

said Inana, Queen of Apsu.

Said Death, "The Me' is how you came

from your world to this timeless place.

You saw the ancients in the Me',

saw their strivings and their failures,
saw them wiped out by the deluge.

They left nothing but their fortress.”
Asked Inana, “Why was that spared?

Spared to be a home for Enki,
or so that I could learn its secrets?

Didn’t your God want it destroyed?”
“He’s not my God but the true God,”
said Death to Queen Inana.

“But to answer your main question,

it was spared so you could find it.”

Death then led the Queen Inana
to an object on a table,
in the corner of the large room,

about a foot tall, full of light.

“This is the whole of creation,”
Death said to the queen of Apsu.

“You see all places and all time.

You see past, present and future.
Part of the past, you’ve been shown.
But this grey place is beyond time.
From here, I see all deeds of men.”

Said Inana, “I see no dead.”
And so Death gave her this answer.
“I bring them here and escort them
through the door to meet the true God.

On them will he pass his judgment.
Those who are with him will remain.
But for those who stand against him,
they are sent through the other door.”

Asked Inana, “Why am I here?
For I said I’ll not go with you.”
Death said, “No, you are still living.
As I’ve said, you’re at a crossroads.

You must choose to serve the true God.

From their idols, turn the people.
For you know your gods are idols,
legends caused by truth distorted.

Neither follow the old one's ways,
for they tried to be their own gods.
And in trying, wrought destruction
upon themselves and on their world."

Said Inana, "If all I've seen,
heard and felt is indeed the truth,
utterly then, I must submit
all my life to him, the true God."

"So you must," Death told Inana.

Said Inana, "And if I don't?
Will you steal my life away?
Will you drag my soul to your God?

Know that I submit to no one.
I am Inana, Queen of Apsu.
Over Nergal, I will triumph.
I'll do this without your true God."

So Inana, queen of Apsu,
fled from Calculon, the cherub.
That's the name that Death once went by
at beginning of creation.

From Death's stronghold fled Inana.
She jumped back into the casket,
shut the lid and sealed herself in,
to return to Enki's stronghold.

When she opened the lid again,
She was back to where she started.
With her sword, she struck the casket,
so that Death would not pursue her.

From the sword blow of Inana,
the casket fell down and shattered.

Never again would it take her
to Death's home in the grey landscape.

For a long time, there was silence,
as Inana stood and pondered
all the sights and sounds she had felt
while she was sealed inside the Me'.

She had hoped to find some weapon,
or some knowledge that the old ones
had to vanquish their enemies.

For she wanted to beat Nergal.

Instead she learned that Sin wasn't real.

That the gods of songs were idols.

Even though there was a true God,
he would not help her in battle.

What he wanted was surrender,

to lay down her sword and follow.
She'd know happiness, he promised,
but her own, she'd be no longer.

Still she thought, the Me' had power.
Out of time, it had taken her.
Could she have found a use for it?
Could she then banish exiled Nergal?

She thought perhaps she'd been hasty
in smashing the Me' to pieces.
She thought Death would have pursued her,
but he hadn't tried to follow.

She knelt down and saw the pieces,
looked for signs of the inscriptions
that had been on the casket's lid.
Were they the source of its powers?

She gathered up seven pieces
that had legible inscription.

She decided to take them to
old Enki the master craftsman.

Found him sleeping on his cushions.
The tablets she dropped on the floor.

Enki awakened at the noise.

Groggily, he faced Inana.

“What is going on?” he asked her.

“Ninurta took me down below,
to the catacombs of this place.
There I found a great stone casket.”

At this news, Enki’s eyes widened,
and his hands took up the tablets.

Told Inana, “Yes, I know these.

In my youth, I entered the Me’.

It showed me things and took me to
a grey place beyond space and time.

Calculon, I encountered,

angel of death, who serves the true God.”

“Were you like me?” asked Inana.

“Were you told you had to submit?
Submit to him, the true ageless God?
Renounce both idols and yourself?”

“That is the offer and command,”
Said Enki, the aged craftsman.

“For, like you, I wanted no part.
Since my wife’s death, I served myself.”

“When I returned to our world,
I took my sword and struck it down,
destroyed the Me’ but kept the lid
because it had the inscriptions.

Death’s pursuit, I hoped to prevent.
For us all, he will one day come,
but he will not one day sooner,”
said Inana, queen of Apsu.

“What you’ve done is most amazing,”
answered Enki, master craftsman.
“I found it once, but never returned.
After that, I feared its power.”

“Was my searching all in vain then?
Could we use this in our own way?
Either go to other places,
or banish our foes?” asked the queen.

“That I know not, queen of Apsu,”
replied Enki, master craftsman.
“But I see that you are tired.
Why not rest while I examine?”

So she went back to the guest room
where Tammuz and Ninshabar were.
At the sight of her, they bowed down
until Inana bade them rise up.

She saw they had many questions,
but she waved her hand and told them,
“I must rest before I tell you
what has happened to me this day.

Guard the door and let none enter
till I wake up and recover.”
Then Inana, queen of Apsu
collapsed on the bed and slumbered.

XIV

For twelve hours did she slumber
until she rose and called them over,
Tammuz, her guard and her lover,
and Ninshabar, lovely maiden.

And she told them all her story,
of her journey out of this world,
of the frightful revelation
that the songs of gods were fables.

And she told them of the true God,

and about his great commandment.

How she refused it and had fled,
bringing with her the shattered lid.

Ninshabar and Tammuz were shocked
to have all these revelations.

They, too, needed time to process.
Then her handmaid asked a question.

“My queen, may we live this place now?

Enki looks on me with lust here,
though Tammuz here has protected.”

Said Tammuz, “I don’t fear Enki.

He’s lecherous, but an old man.

Though I agree with Ninshabar.

Might we now return to Apsu?”

Asked Inana, “Where’s the tablets?

When I struck down the Me’ tablet,
seven pieces came from the lid.”

Said Tammuz, "They are with Enki."

So Inana went to Enki.

She found him inside his chamber.

He studied the tablets closely.

When he heard her, he did look up,
smiling, hunched over the tablets.

He then bade her sit beside him.

So with her, he shared his findings.

"I've chipped away extra rubble.
I've shaped them as proper tablets."

Pointing to tools on the table,
then said, "I've begun to read them."

Said Inana, "Did you retain
the symbols and the inscriptions?"

Said Enki, "I took extra care
to ensure no knowledge was lost."

Asked Inana, "You can read them?"

The old ones spoke not our language.”

Said Enki, “I picked out some words,
and from there have more deciphered.

For in language, they surpassed us.

The sounds were not only language.

Their speakers and listeners were
made a part of what had been said.”

Inana did not understand.

And so Enki, master craftsman,

Did point out basic words and sounds,
and their symbols on the tablets.

Tedious the reading began,
but then came faster and clearer.

Then understood Queen Inana.
The more she read, the more it built up.
In her mind’s eye, the words took shape,
but not merely mental pictures.

No, the writings worked on her mind.

They not only conveyed ideas,
but the place and time of writing.

She felt herself thinking ancient

thoughts and feelings like the writers
of the symbols and inscriptions.

Sharper and faster did grow her mind.

“No, these words are not mere writing,

but experience completed.

To read and hear them is to be changed,”

Said Inana then to Enki.

Indeed Enki, master craftsman

looked sharper and more aware than

he had been in probably decades.

Sharp, clear and living, his eyes looked.

So their studies they continued.

Sought to learn all the Me's secrets.

Saw that it could travel to both
lands of the living and the dead.

Enki said, "This is amazing!"

"We could reach into the dead's land.

I could recover my lost wife!

I'd no longer drown in vices."

Said Inana, "Can that be so?

If we kept ourselves from dying,
we'd be immortal forever.

An incredible advantage,
but to you forget the true God?

How he flooded the old ones' world
to keep them from doing that thing?

Would he really overlook us?"

Said Enki, "I want no empire.

Just my wife and life forever.

Everything else can be the true God's.

So my lot, I won't overstep."

With more study of the tablets,

agreed Enki and Inana

to call forth the wife of Enki,

to engage in necromancy.

On the floor were placed six tablets.

They placed the first six tablets

in a circle of confinement

for whatever then would come forth.

Enki read the seventh tablet,

read from it an incantation.

In the circle, dust was stirring,

wind picked up and came a shadow.

It had form and shape of woman.

Inana had never seen her,

but the craftsman was rejoicing.

“Come, Ninurta!” shouted Enki.
“I’ve returned to us your mother.”

He reached out and touched the specter.
He intended to embrace her.
But then Enki hesitated,
And his movements did grow sluggish.

Ninurta came through the door with
Ninshabar and also Tammuz.
For they heard the shouts of Enki,
and wanted to see what happened.

Enki, meanwhile, started coughing.
He sat down with shaking knees and
Ninurta ran to his father.
He looked upon his mother’s spirit.

Still confined within the circle,
the specter did stretch forth its hands.
Pleading silently for release,

it seemed to be getting stronger.

The details of form grew sharper.
As it strengthened, Enki weakened.
Enki's throat filled with congestion.
Ninurta cried out and held him.

But his father weakened further,
eyes glazed over, skin cold and damp.

Inana realized that Enki
was not struck with natural sickness.

His wife's ghost was draining his strength.

"The world hasn't the energy
to sustain both dead and living.
That's the reason why the dead go

to lands separate from the living."

"Who speaks?" demanded Inana.

With her servants, she looked around.
Saw that Death had now appeared there.

Death did then address Inana
who had grabbed the seventh tablet.

“Say the reverse incantation.
Send the spirit back to its place.”

Though she usually took not orders,
Queen Inana did obey him.
Sent the spirit away, wailing.
Then nothing stood in the circle.

But it had been too late to
save Enki, the master craftsman.
With a final cough, he perished
in the arms of his grieving son.

And they saw the shade of Enki
rise like black mist from the body.
Death reached forward and took its hand.
Then did both of them disappear.

Death returned shortly thereafter.
Came without the shade of Enki.
Said, "Now do you see, Inana?
The tablet's a work of evil.

It removes the dead from their place
back to the land of the living.
From the living, they drain power,
bringing forth chaotic darkness.

You have learned the truth of the world.
It's not too late to choose the good.
Quickly, destroy the Me' tablets,
and give yourself now to the true God."

Said Inana, "Never will I
serve anyone, only myself.
Even if he is the true God,
he is not master over me!"

The queen then held up the tablet,

and brandished it in Death's direction.
She said, "Begone, Death, from this place!
Obey Inana, mighty queen."

Death seemed to struggle and convulse.
Showed his true form to Inana,
that of Calculon, the cherub.
Nine feet tall stood the cherubim.

Three pairs of wings and full of eyes.
Had four heads of different creatures,
eagle ox, lion and human.
A mighty one from ancient times.

Then Ninurta and Ninshabar
did cry out and hide their faces.
Tammuz, shaking, brandished his sword,
but Inana held the tablet.

"I fear not death. I master it!"
said Inana, queen of Apsu.

Standing firm, she did repulse Death.
Vanished he then from her presence.

XV

Ninurta hugged his father's corpse.
Said, "Now I've lost both my parents.
He should not have used the tablet.
It's indeed a thing of evil."

Said Ninshabar, "My queen should you
make sure of the tablet's power?
Perhaps we would be better off
if the tablets were now broken."

Tammuz bid her to be silent.
"Handmaiden, you forget your place.
You must obey, and never question.
And besides, you saw what happened.

Queen Inana drove away Death.
She can command even spirits.

Such a one is more than human.
She may soon become a goddess.”

“Nevertheless,” said Ninurta.
“If you will not break the tablet,
I would ask you, take it from here.
Leave this place, o Queen Inana.”

Said Inana, queen of Apsu,
“Yes, it’s time for us to depart.
I am sorry for your father,
but his death was not by my hand.”

Ninurta gave them three horses.
They rode out into the canyon
with the Me’ tablets beside her,
pondering the newfound power.

Ninurta buried his father.
Buried Enki, master craftsman,
now and forever reunited

with the wife he'd long ago lost.

XVI

So the queen returned to Apsu.

Reunited with her siblings,
who were much relieved to see her.
They asked why she had stayed away.

Inana led them to their rooms,
so that they could speak in private.

Atrahasis, Ninshabar and
Tammuz followed to hear her words.

Inana showed them the tablets
brought forth from the Me's broken lid.
She told them how she'd obtained them,
and what had been revealed to her.

Then Erishkigal, her sister
became sorrowful and cried out.
"What are you telling me, Inana?
That the sacred songs are fiction?

That the stories have no meaning?
That our mother and ancestors
were deceived by lies and fables?
Be not blasphemous, my sister.

The truth cannot be what you saw.
Sin is true god over the moon.
Every night, he guards over us.”
Said Inana, “What you see there

in the night sky is not a god.
It is but a large stone floating
through an empty, dark, and cold sky.
Even if not lies of poets,

Sin created not existence,
but formed from it, say the stories.
Even if they were not fiction,
gods would merely be a people,

longer lived and older, perhaps,
but with no more purpose than us.”
Tears streamed down Erishkigal’s face.

“Lies and blasphemies, Inana!

You have let the Me’ deceive you.
You will bring the gods wrath on us.”

Then said Utu, strong and stolid,
“Sister, Nergal is approaching.

Many warriors at his side.
If not Sin, then who will help us
If the gods are nonexistent?”
Said Inana, “Our own victory

we must take, and make our meaning.”

Atrahasis then addressed her.
“But though our gods perhaps be false,
you had also seen a true God.

Would it not be wise to call him?”

“That I will not do,” the queen said.

“He only wants full submission.”

“If the true God he indeed is,

we would be giving him his due.

We should obey our creator,”

Atrahasis told Inana.

“With these tablets, I could do more,”

said Inana, queen of Apsu.

Then she told them another thing.

“I learned I could even command

Death himself, and he must obey.”

“I have been thinking on these things

since I left the house of Enki.

If I could capture Death himself,

I could rule over death and life.

Apsu would no longer need gods.

I, Inana, would be a goddess.

Let the people then worship me.
I can save them, not the true God."

Utu asked his fearsome sister,
"Could you really do such a thing?"
Declared Tammuz, "I say he can."
But the others did not like this.

XVII

All their fears and doubts ignoring,
Inana took six of the tablets,
arranged them into a circle,
and held high the seventh tablet.

She shouted, "The queen of Apsu,
I, Inana, call forth you, Death.
Come and stand inside the circle
made by the six other tablets."

The Angel of Death did appear
as an unassuming grey man.
Stood in the midst of the circle

to the wonder of everyone.

“Death, I bind you where you stand now.

You will never leave the circle.

The dead you will take no longer
to the true God, and to judgment.

Death cried out, and showed his true form.

He appeared as a cherubim,
spread his wings to leave the circle,
but found he could not escape it.

An unseen force did restrain him.

He found himself imprisoned by
Inana, queen of Apsu,
who was now a necromancer.

Tammuz and her brother, Utu,
prostrated themselves before her.

“You are truly a new goddess.
We will worship you, Inana.”

But the others did not bow down.

Atrahasis and Ninshabar

Saw in this folly, her ruin.

Erishkigal mourned her losses.

Mourned her gods, and of her sister.

“You must release me, queen of Apsu,”

Death called from within the circle.

“You know not what you are doing.

Without me, the dead remain here.

If they are stuck with the living,

Then they’ll take life from the living.

If they find they can’t cross over,

then they’ll want to hold onto life.

There is not sufficient power

for every soul, dead and living.

So the dead will pull the living

down with them, till they are all dead.

Thus your city will then become
a place where only the dead are.”

Inana laughed at him then.

Said, “You will not earn your freedom
with frightful words and empty threats.

I now rule the living and the dead.”

So she left him there in prison.

XVIII

Nergal and his men soon after
did assemble outside Apsu.

Issued challenges to the city.

Thus Inana, queen of Apsu,

with her court stood on the top wall.

She looked down upon her uncle,
and she shouted down her answer.

“Nergal, long have you threatened us!

Sought to take what was never yours.

Inana, today, will triumph.”
And she raised the seventh tablet,
that she carried, over her head.

Began chanting most unholy
and to the living world, drew spirits.
Nergal and his men did cry out.
They saw shadows without bodies.

The shadows surrounded Nergal,
brandishing shadows of weapons.
Nergal and his men did attack
the spirits but could not touch them.

Weapons of the living passed through
the shadow forms of the spirits.
Nergal and his men did stagger.
They weakened, and started coughing.

The spirits Inana summoned
drained away all of their life force.

Finally, their foes did succumb.
Nergal and his men did perish.

Fell before the spirit's onslaught,
their shadows rose from their corpses.

Uttering new incantations,
Inana did use the tablet

to dismiss and banish all of
the spirits standing below her.

And the queen of Apsu did laugh,
saying, "Now, at last, I've triumphed!"

XIX

Though, as the months and years passed,
the queen's triumph did grow hollow.

For as time passed, people perished
from diseases and from old age.

Without Death to guide them from life,
for Inana held him captive,
the dead wandered through the streets of

the city where they had fallen.

As Death had warned, they stole life force.

With a blight, the crops did wither.

And others living did perish.

The city of Apsu crumbled.

Inana did use her powers

of necromancy to send them

on their way or to control them.

But the dead increased in number.

Died Erishkigal, her sister,

without even fighting for life.

Losing gods drove her to despair,

along with her sister's foul deeds.

Moreover, some of the spirits

did try to inhabit corpses

of the people, dogs, and rats,

trying in vain to live again.

When the spirits possessed corpses,
A change did come upon the form.
The cadaver's heads did fall off.
At the neck base, a mouth remained.

They became known as the prowlers.
They were vicious and attacked all.
The soldiers of Apsu fought them,
for if pierced, the spirits left them.

Tammuz and Utu fought prowlers.
Of the beasts, they did slay many.
But one day, they both did perish
by the prowlers' teeth and clawing.

Ninshabar and Atrahasis
did plead with the queen, Inana,
to release Death from the circle,
and restore the natural order.

Inana refused, saying, "Never.
Over life and death, I'm ruling.
I am now the people's goddess,
and the sole ruler of Apsu.

Would you really have me free Death?
What do you think he'd do to us
after being in the circle?
Do you think he'd be forgiving?

No, he'll have no chance for vengeance.
Neither will the ageless true God.
I, Inana, Queen of Apsu,
I will triumph. They will despair."

Atrahasis asked Inana,
"Is it worth what you are losing?
You've lost siblings and your lover.
Apsu has become a graveyard."

Inana said, "I have their spirits.

I can call them at my leisure.
Soon, I'll learn to control prowlers.
I'm a goddess. I will triumph."

Ninshabar and Atrahasis,
with eyes downcast, and long faces,
bowed before her, and departed.
For they saw what was occurring.

Like the old ones of long ago,
the queen was being corrupted.
Drunk with power and selfishness,
she held on to pride and anger.

She had not become a goddess,
but instead was now a devil.
She would bring Apsu to ruin.
Ninshabar then wept bitterly.

For she knew Inana once was
good and noble before she had

gained the power of the tablets.

Atrahasis said to Ninshabar,

“We can no longer allow this.

We must break the spell, and free Death.

We must restore our world to order.”

Said Ninshabar, “What must I do?

Must I really now turn traitor?

The queen’s family took me in.

I’m more sister now than servant.”

Said he, “The queen you knew is gone.

Let us wait until she slumbers.

We will take the tablet from her.”

Thus decided Atrahasis.

The maid nodded reluctantly.

XX

Darkness fell that night in Apsu.

Ninshabar and Atrahasis

snuck into Inana’s bedroom.

The queen was sleeping on her mat.

At her side, they saw the tablet.

They tiptoed into the darkness.

Ninshabar knelt at the queen's side.

She reached out and grabbed the tablet.

Inana just then awakened.

Her eyes opened and were groggy.

Atrahasis leapt upon her,

Then he said to the handmaiden,

“Ninshabar, go to the throne room!

Take it to the prison circle.

You must free Death from his capture.

Only he can stop this terror!”

Inana realized their intent.

In a rage, she fought against him.

Atrahasis wrestled against her.

She was strong, but he restrained her.

Ninshabar ran with the tablet.
She shortly then reached the circle.
Saw that Death was still imprisoned.
Death did see the maid approaching.

Asked her, "Are you willing to free me
Handmaiden of Queen Inana?
I see goodness lies in your heart.
You will save your people, wont you?"

Inana, meanwhile, proved stronger,
and she threw off Atrahasis.
Ran to pursue the handmaiden.
Atrahasis struggled after.

Ninshabar said, "Apsu's dying.
My queen has only brought ruin.
Yes, I know what I must do.
Make things right once I have freed you."

With a strength that came upon her,
she dashed the tablet to the floor,
and broke it in countless pieces.
The queen came in time to see it.

Shrieking at her maid's betrayal,
She advanced upon Ninshabar.
Atrahasis reached the circle,
kicking at the other tablets.

Death, now free, became a cherub,
became Calculon, the mighty.
Spread his wings and roared a loud roar
that woke the entire city.

Inana turned to face him.
Atrahasis called Ninshabar.
"Let us leave and let them battle.
Let us leave and warn the others."

Inana summoned the spirits

she had previously controlled.
But Death raised his hands, and sent them
from the living world to judgment.

Atrahasis and Ninshabar
ran into the streets of Apsu
where a crowd had been gathering,
awakened by the commotion.

Shouting, they pointed to the palace
as blackened shades flew towards it.

The palace began to rumble,
and stones broke away from its walls.

The ground shook, and Atrahasis
cried a warning to the people.
“We must all now leave the city,
for this battle will destroy it!”

So the crowd ran for the front gate,
joined by others along the way.

To the plains, they all retreated.
Then they looked upon the city.

Many did shed tears of sorrow.
Ninshabar was chief among them.

Apsu collapsed into rubble.
Death had taken the dead with him.

Begin anew, the race of men would.
New cities and nations would rise.
They must learn to watch their actions,
So as not to share Apsu's fate.